



STAND AGAINST VETERAN SUICIDE

The Fire Watch Has Trained More Than 10,000 Floridians in Veteran Suicide Prevention via its Innovative ‘Watch Stander’ Program

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. – Today [The Fire Watch](#), a Florida nonprofit dedicated to ending Veteran suicide, announced that it has surpassed a major milestone – 10,000 community members across Florida trained to recognize the warning signs of Veterans in crisis and to direct them to services they need.

Each year more than 6,000 U.S. Veterans take their own lives, including more than 600 here in Florida. Veterans are dying by suicide at a rate nearly 2 times higher that of their civilian counterparts. This tragedy covers all age groups and demographics.

The Fire Watch is Florida’s fight to end Veteran suicide. It was founded under three premises – (1) that suicide is preventable, (2) that we must connect Veterans to resources they need before they slip into crisis, and (3) that the broader community can play a vital role in the effort. Its cornerstone prevention initiative is called the [Watch Stander Program](#), an early intervention, life-saving network of community members trained to identify risk factors of Veterans in crisis and direct those Veterans to the resources they need. The program was launched in 2020. It is free, takes just 30 to 45 minutes, and is available to anyone by clicking [here](#).

“10,000 Watch Standers is a major milestone for us,” says Fire Watch Executive Director Nick Howland. “The Watch Stander program is modeled after CPR. Across Florida, our neighbors, co-workers, friends, and family members are completing the training, standing vigilant to the concerns of Veterans, and, when necessary, referring them to life-saving resources. Data shows that over the next 12 months our 10,000 Watch Standers will direct more than 15,000 Florida Veterans to the services they need.”

“After they’ve served our nation, Veterans step back into the community,” said Board Chair Brigadier General (Ret.) Mike Fleming, “The Watch Stander program gives community members the opportunity to help Veterans beyond thanking them for their service. Veterans are heroes who have written blank checks for amounts up to and including their lives to protect our communities. Our Florida communities are joining together to protect them.”

Approximately 7,000 of the 10,000 Watch Standers have never served in the U.S. military. The largest concentration of Watch Standers is in Northeast Florida, where the program initially launched.

[Veteran suicide data](#) collected for The Fire Watch by [NLP Logix](#) from the Florida Department of Health and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs shows that, since 2019, Veteran suicides nationwide are down 1%. Across Florida, Veteran suicides are down 5% and, in Northeast Florida, they are down 25%.

According to a University of Kentucky study of [Suicide Bereavement in Veterans and Military Families](#), 135 people are affected by every suicide. That means, when considering the reduction in Veteran suicides from 2019 to 2023 in Northeast Florida alone, 16,000 fewer community members are mourning the loss of a Veteran friend, colleague, or loved one since the program started.

The Watch Stander program is working. To join our fight to end Veteran suicide, please [click here](#).

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About The Fire Watch:

Based in Florida, The Fire Watch Project, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) non-profit dedicated to ending Veteran suicide by raising awareness of the urgent need for intervention. By training community members to recognize suicidal behaviors in Veterans, The Fire Watch strives to build a life-saving network of coworkers, family, and friends that stands watch over our nation's heroes and directs Veterans in need to vital upstream services and crisis care resources. Learn more at www.thefirewatch.org.

Media Contact

Nick Howland

Executive Director, The Fire Watch Project, Inc.

info@TheFireWatch.org